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*The Forester's Changing
Role in Outdoor
Recreation*

by
GRANT W. SHARPE

SOMEONE TOLD me years ago "the future of forest recreation in the United States will be what foresters want it to be." I have thought about this many times since, watching to see in which direction the profession would lean in its attitude toward recreation, and it seems to me that many foresters have leaned in the wrong direction. The attitude of some professional foresters has been negative and even disdainful. Anyone with an interest in recreation has been considered, until very recently at least, to be a bit odd, a kind of nearer-my-God-to-thee forester.

It has been considered necessary to criticize, to belittle, to "view-with-alarm" any proposals to establish new recreation areas, whether they were to be in forested areas or in sand dunes along a lakeshore or ocean. We've seen one vote after another in the local chapters of our own professional society against most recreational proposals. As professional foresters we seem to have established a record that opposes new park, seashore, and other recreation area proposals, and yet in spite of our actions these areas became established. We opposed the Wilderness Bill (though not necessarily the idea of wilderness) and it finally passed, admittedly in drastically modified form. Consider another classic example, when foresters bitterly opposed the establishment of Olympic National Park. It too, eventually was set aside. We later fought this park's expansion, but the more we argued, the bigger the park became. These are only two examples of the futility of our opposition. It seems the forestry profession has been out of touch with public opinion.

Must we always be on the losing side? Why don't we face reality? No matter how much our profession raises its voice in protest of new recreation areas, the public usually gets the areas it demands. And yet we wonder why the public mistrusts us or why our public image is slipping.

Is the public as gullible as we think? Don't they wonder about a profession that has substituted the adjectives "over-ripe, decaying, insect-infested, hazardous, and overmature," for the term they want to bear, namely "*Virgin Forest*"? They must wonder too about full-page national advertisements that show clear-cutting in scenes of refreshing greenness (never any slash showing) with some brightly colored and accommodating wildlife performing in the foreground. Don't you suppose the readers notice these advertisements are painted illustrations, not photographs?

But this is 1965. Why cite these examples from the unenlightened past? We've turned over a new leaf. Or have we?

No sooner had the Redwood Park proposal been aired this year than local California foresters (Jedediah Smith chapter) went on record as opposing the park, using the same old worn-out arguments that lost us the battles before. The terminology has

been updated, but not the thinking behind it. A notable exception apparently occurred at the section level in northern California, where they stated:

"We support the establishment and necessary development of local, state and national parks to preserve and permit enjoyment of outstanding scenic, scientific, historical, inspirational and recreation areas, provided intensive study clearly establishes that the long-time public interest requires the permanent sacrifice of alternative uses and values." (1)

Unfortunately the policy statement goes on to its full length criticizing the proposal as it was written and quickly loses sight of the initial reason for the proposal, the need to protect more old growth redwoods. After this good beginning, the old pattern emerges, with the same statements that have been tried in other conflicts, and tried unsuccessfully.

Such pathetic attempts to cloud issues are from the old school of forestry. With the growing need to establish new recreation areas today, and federal and state administrations willing to do just this, it seems apparent that our opposition is not necessarily going to stop a federal redwood park. The American Forest Products Industries, Inc. and California Redwood Association are to be commended for their 1965 publication, *Our Growing Redwoods*, which left this reader at least, with the impression that facts can be stated without bias.

But let's get back to the profession of forestry and its attitude towards forest recreation. How quickly our public image would change if organized foresters, not just individual foresters, were to go on record favoring some of the proposed recreation areas. I do not mean to imply that the profession's attitude must change merely because it is unpopular, but rather that it is unpopular because it is outdated. The question of whether public forest land, at least, is to be used for timber production or recreation is now a social decision, rather than one controlled by the forestry profession.

This is not to say the past must be completely repudiated. As foresters we have many fine accomplishments to our credit, but now some of our colleagues in other fields look at us with suspicion, and perhaps for good reason. The boom in outdoor recreation was forecast in the 1950's, yet the forestry profession looked the other way. We were once at the front of the conservation movement. Today we see the geographers, political scientists, economists, sociologists, physical education recreationists, and men in other related fields taking the leadership from us. Our narrow traditional concept of forestry is delegating us to the role of followers. To quote Spurr,

"As professionals we should also be liberals. We should be prepared to accept our responsibilities in large area land management of all sorts. If we don't we may only pass the torch to others who may be less qualified to carry out the task." (2)

Actually, recreation is nothing new to some foresters, but most of these foresters are already in the parks and recreation field. They came by their recreation knowledge through experience, rather than by training. Recreation to the timber manager is something new, and it is being forced on him by a demanding public. Suddenly the public expects anyone managing a forest to provide recreation facilities, whether it is a public or a private forest. It's the writer's belief that we are just seeing the beginning of the demand on the forest for recreational use.

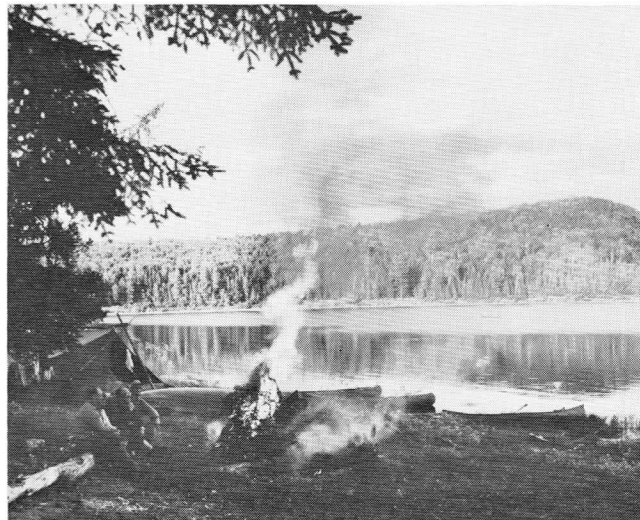
How much land can we spare? We should realize that recreation is not the only new demand being placed on the forest. Everyone is in the race for outdoor space. The transportation industry has huge needs. A jet airport needs about 3,800 acres; an expressway interchange needs 600 feet of width; and a right of way requires 200 or 300 feet of land, consuming 36 or more acres a mile. Look at residential development, where we find people's tastes are changing. Our appetite for land is growing. We want bigger lots, from $\frac{1}{2}$ to 2 acres per unit. We can get this only in the country, on agricultural or forest land. The demands of education take up open land. Ten acres for a primary school; 40 acres for a high school; 600 acres for a university. What are industries' space requirements? The planners of industries, such as extractives, processing, chemical, fabrication, energy transfer, printing, livestock and others, feel 5 to 8 acres are needed for every acre of floor space. Consider the thousands of acres of forested land some reservoirs will require.

Recreation we see is only one of many forms of activity creating a competitive space need, but it's one we foresters can do something about. The timber manager may ask, "What about timber? Where are we going to grow our fiber and wood for the future? Does this mean we put all forest land into recreational use?" Of course not, but let the land not suited to recreation be used for timber production.

Just what will be our timber needs in the future? Because of wood imports, and the competition from plastics, foams, aluminum, cement, glass, and even bamboo, wood consumption has not kept up with population growth, in fact in some instances we use less wood than formerly. An increased population therefore, doesn't mean increased wood consumption. We already see that wood consumption is not increasing proportionately with the population growth. But recreational use is expanding at a rate five times that of our population growth!

It should be made clear that the comments here are aimed at public forests. The chief function of private land forestry will be to meet our future timber needs and not to provide recreation. No company should be pressured into providing recreation facilities on its lands, though this may happen as desirable public recreation lands become scarce. When private owners face the threat of having their

land made into public recreation areas, conflicts are certainly going to arise in our profession. If we can only stay calm, and realize the public wants more from the forest than wood and fiber, a reasonable solution will be found. Some companies have already found there are advantages to maintaining a favorable "recreation attitude" and have gotten into recreation development. As the problems of liability are solved more company forests undoubtedly will be opened to intensive recreational use.



Let's return to public forests. When I first came to the University of Michigan in 1956, I mentioned to my first forest recreation class that within 10 years the eastern national forests would see recreation as their most important use. Out of regard for the problems of a new professor these graduate students, all of them foresters, refrained from laughing me out of the room. Yet today, one scarcely needs to make so obvious a comment. It is interesting to note that President Johnson's February 8, 1965 address to Congress, he recommends that "... we add prime outdoor recreation areas to our National Forest system, particularly in the populous East."

In recent years the U.S. Forest Service has demonstrated its ability to deal intelligently with the escalating needs of recreation. Its excellent research facilities have been utilized to chart the direction of future recreational development. It has established specific recreation research centers, such as the one at Warren, Pennsylvania, and placed cooperative recreation research units at four forestry schools around the country. To meet the educational needs of the visiting public, the Forest Service is now initiating interpretive media such as nature trails, conducted hikes, and visitor centers. Its large expenditures for recreation development, its recent inventory of forest recreation resources, the reworked land classification system, the hiring of new personnel to handle recreation, and the creation of the "America's Playground" image, are all indicative of the Forest Service's new look.

Assuming our wood and fiber needs can be met, what then is the crux of the problem? It still seems to be the general attitude of foresters toward recreation.

Are we afraid of recreation? Perhaps we feel its beneath our professional dignity to get involved. Possibly it's the visitors we can't stand because recreation does bring in the factor of the human personality. Thus comes the need for an understanding of psychology, sociology, esthetics, spiritual values and other knowledge a forester probably didn't acquire while in college.

While in college! Is this where we acquired our narrow viewpoint? It's a disturbing possibility. During the period between 1900 and 1955 a total of 3232 forestry theses, both master's and doctor's, were accepted by colleges and universities in the United States. Of these, only 27 pertained to recreation. Even today few of our forestry schools offer a course in forest recreation, and where it is offered, it is usually not a requirement. Perhaps this is a blessing in disguise, for unfortunately some of these forest recreation courses are being taught by people with no experience in that field. The connotation "Mickey Mouse" course is heard, and so the serious timber management student avoids it.

Students should be able to attend a school which is willing to make new fields available to them, thus broadening a student's outlook rather than narrowing it. Let's consider some of the problems of setting

up a forest recreation option. There might well be competition with existing programs. Within the last five years several physical education and park management programs have sprung up or are anticipated on campuses in various parts of the country. Some of these programs will short-change their students because of the absence of a strong natural resource base of the kind that forestry offers. This base is needed for extensive wildland management. Some of these programs exist on campuses where forestry is also taught, but have no tie with forestry. The forestry school, slow to awaken to its opportunity, now may find itself in an unpleasant and difficult dispute with its cross-campus colleagues if it wants to train recreationists.

Is it necessary for every forestry school to develop an undergraduate option in recreation? I seriously doubt if the market for recreationists will ever be that great. Certainly each forestry school should have one general course in forest recreation, taught at a professional level, for, like it or not, the forester is becoming involved in recreation. Forest Service recreation visits have risen over 500% since World War II. State forest visits are increasing, though at a lesser rate because funds for recreation development have not always been forthcoming. Most states are developing statewide recreation plans which include forested lands as potential recreation sites. Some states have appropriated large sums for purchase and development of recreation lands.



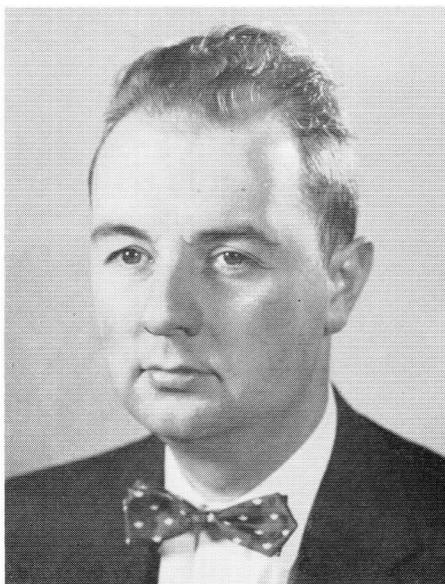
The Land and Water Conservation Fund Act, passed in 1964, provides matching funds for recreation planning, land acquisition and development projects. The new Bureau of Outdoor Recreation, through its coordination efforts with all levels of government, and its nation wide plan will soon be pin-pointing recreation needs. Two recent national conferences on outdoor recreation, one at Ann Arbor (1963) on recreation research needs, and the other at Syracuse (1964), on recreation education needs, have added greatly to our understanding of the outdoor recreation picture.

At these conferences the interest and involvement of other groups was evident. At the same time these

groups now realize foresters have taken a fresh look at recreation and apparently are in the recreation business to stay. And after all, this is only as it should be, since the foresters manage the land on which the great majority of recreational activities take place.

Perhaps the day is not too far off when the forestry profession will find its recreation involvement a real source of pride.

- (1) A review of "The Redwoods." Prepared by the Policy Committee, Northern California Section, Society of American Foresters. 1964
- (2) Spurr, S. H. 1964. "The Ambivalence of the Forestry" 62:837-838.



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